

< Ernest Hemingway's 'A Moveable Feast' Hits French Bestseller List After Paris Attacks

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KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:

In the days since the terrorist attacks in Paris, something unexpected has happened. A half-century old book by an American writer has gone to the top of the bestseller list in France. The book is Ernest Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast." Reporter Lauren Frayer reports.

LAUREN FRAYER, BYLINE: Among the Parisians laying flowers outside the Bataclan concert hall where their countrymen were killed was Danielle Merian, age 77.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

DANIELLE MERIAN: (Speaking French).

FRAYER: "It's very important to bring flowers for the dead," she told French TV.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

MERIAN: (Speaking French).

FRAYER: "And it's very important to see, among the flowers, copies of Hemingway's book 'A Moveable Feast,'" she said, "because we are a very ancient civilization, and we will hold high the banner of our values." In just days, that video clip has gone viral in France. Local media have dubbed Merian the nation's grandmother, and Paris shops struggle to stock enough of Ernest Hemingway's 1964 book, "A Moveable Feast."

ADAM BILES: So we have "A Moveable Feast," the restored edition, the hardback

version, and then we also have the copy that I am holding here.

FRAYER: Adam Biles is a manager at Shakespeare and Company, an English-language bookshop along the Seine River. For those who haven't read "A Moveable Feast..."

BILES: It's the story of an apprentice writer in Paris in the 1920s with everything you can imagine that entails. So there's plenty of drinking. There's lots of fraternizing with other artists. Lots of famous names make appearances. We have Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald.

FRAYER: Since the Paris attacks, he says the book has become...

BILES: A symbol of optimism. It's a symbol of Paris as Paris should be. It's a symbol of cafe culture. It's a symbol of literary culture. It's a symbol of artists fraternizing on the terrace. It's everything that, in many ways, was attacked last Friday night.

FRAYER: Inside Hemingway's old hangout, a cafe called Les Deux Magots, a waiter points to a black and white photo of the American writer on the wall.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: (Speaking French).

FRAYER: The cafe still serves tiny glasses of absinthe liquor.

(Speaking French).

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: (Speaking French).

FRAYER: Albeit a weaker version of what Hemingway used to drink here with fellow writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. Out on the terrace, two friends, Francois du Passage and Charles Coutier, raise a glass to the Paris Hemingway wrote about.

FRANCOIS DU PASSAGE: Paris is still alive. We go to restaurants. We still go to bars.

CHARLES COUTIER: We are French, so we love party and sex and absinthe. So let's go out.

FRAYER: Du Passage had never heard of Hemingway's book. He says a love letter to

Paris, especially now, sounds like something he needs to read. For NPR News, I'm
Lauren Frayer in Paris.

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